

Work Experience Policy

Introduction

This policy sets out the Council's approach to work experience, how work experience placements are arranged, the obligations on the Council and the person taking part in work experience (known in this document as a 'student') and the regulatory framework which applies.

Policy statement

As a large employer, Epping Forest District Council recognises that members of the public will seek work experience placements, and its obligations to consider these. Such requests are welcomed by the Council, mindful of its wish to contribute to the economic prosperity of the District, and the promotion of social inclusion. We also recognise that in addition to such placements providing benefit for the student, they are sometimes a source of future staff, therefore contributing to the Council's recruitment strategy.

The Council will consider carefully all requests for work experience on the basis of the skills and interests of the individual and our ability to provide useful placements with appropriate levels of supervision. It is not possible to agree all requests for work experience given the large number of applications.

Definition and purpose of work experience

Work experience is the provision of an unpaid work placement with the Council for a time-limited period, in order to assist the student in pursuing their preferred job or career choice, or complementing their chosen or intended course of study. During the placement the Council will aim to provide work experience for the student which, so far as is reasonably practicable, reflects their requirements. Reasonable expenses may be paid where appropriate, for example travel to attend meetings, or payment for out-of-hours meetings.

In addition, the Department for Education and Skills defines work experience as:

'a placement in which a student carries out a range of tasks and duties, more or less as would an employee, but with the emphasis on the learning aspects of the experience'.

This definition applies to all ages.

Obligations on the Council

The Council will provide, so far as is reasonably practicable, work experience which is in line with the student's requirements and aspirations. Each student will be allocated a placement supervisor who will be responsible for the allocation of work tasks to the student. The supervisor will also provide induction on arrival, and ongoing, appropriate support. At the end of the placement the supervisor will carry out a handover of outstanding work tasks with the student, and will undertake a debriefing, should this be required.

Obligations on the work experience student

The student is required to:

- Comply with all reasonable instructions given by their supervisor or other managers named by the supervisor;
- Undertake any allocated work accurately and diligently. Refer any queries to their supervisor or other named mentor;
- Be present at their work placement during the hours agreed with the supervisor, and to be punctual in their timekeeping;
- Dress appropriately during the placement. For most office based jobs this is defined as 'smart casual' i.e. no jeans or trainers. For non office based jobs the supervisor will inform the student of the requirements;
- Comply with any health and safety instructions relevant to the placement;
- Conduct themselves appropriately in terms of their behaviour, attitudes and actions;
- Observe Council requirements relating to matters such as smoking, personal use of telephones and computers, and
- Contact their supervisor promptly if they are unable to attend the placement due to illness or other reason.

The work experience procedure

1. Entry routes

There are two routes whereby an application for work experience may be received.

- From Trident, an organisation which arranges work experience placements;
- Via a direct application from a person seeking work experience, or their parent/representative.

The majority of requests will be received in the Human Resources Unit, but direct approaches are often made to individual services. If this is the case, services are asked to send all requests to HR for processing. Applications are welcomed from individuals of all ages.

2. Steps taken to secure a placement

On receipt of a request, the Human Resources Unit will ensure that they have a full understanding of the nature of the work experience required and its duration. This may be evident from the applicant's CV, but in some cases further clarification will be required.

The HR unit will then seek to secure a suitable placement for the applicant. This will be done by circulating the applicant's request to services which may be able to offer the work sought. The provisions of the Council's Close Personal Relationships at Work policy will inform the suitability of placements.

Following circulation of the request, the HR unit will allow one week for responses. If a placement is identified the supervisor will make arrangements for the student to attend an interview. A copy of this procedure will be provided to the student at the interview.

If no suitable placements are available the applicant will be informed that the Council was unable to meet their requirements. The applicant will have no right of appeal against this decision.

The purpose of the interview is to ensure that the supervisor has a clear understanding of the student's requirements and is able to meet them. The supervisor will also assess the student's suitability for the placement, or any issues which might make the placement inappropriate. Equally, the interview provides an opportunity for the student to gain an understanding of the work experience available, and provisions of this policy.

If at the conclusion of the interview both parties agree to the placement, the supervisor will then make arrangements for the student to commence.

3. Actions to be taken once a placement has been agreed

The supervisor will be reminded by the HR unit of the provisions of this policy when a placement is agreed.

The supervisor will make arrangements for the placement to begin, ensuring that a plan is drawn up of the various tasks and activities that the student will carry out during the work experience placement, and the staff who will be responsible for the student's work. The supervisor will make arrangements for access to those elements of the Council's ICT systems which are deemed to be essential to the placement, and for the provision of a security pass/ID. Access to any ICT systems will be dependent upon the student agreeing to be bound by the relevant corporate policies.

It will be made clear that there will be no on-site parking available to them unless specific authorisation is sought.

If the placement has been arranged via Trident, documentation will be sent to the supervisor for completion which will form the basis of an agreement between the Council and Trident. A copy of this agreement is to be passed to the HR unit for retention. It is also possible that Trident will ask to visit the site of the placement in order to ensure that the student is working in a safe environment.

If the placement is not arranged via Trident the student will be asked to complete the Work Placement Agreement form attached at Appendix 1. This should then be countersigned by the supervisor and returned to the HR unit for retention.

4. Risk assessment

Prior to the commencement of the placement the supervisor must consider any risks associated with it. This will be particularly important if the student has any special needs or a disability, or is under the age of 18. Existing risk assessments should be used, but it may be necessary to adapt them in the light of any special circumstances. The law requires those providing work experience to carry out a risk assessment from the student's point of view. A student must be protected from risks that they are unlikely to recognise because:

- They are inexperienced, or
- They have not been trained, or
- They may not pay enough attention to health and safety.

A student is also likely to need more supervision because they are in unfamiliar surroundings and carrying out tasks which they are not used to.

The law also requires that the parents or guardians of anyone below the minimum school leaving age be informed of the findings of the risk assessment prior to the beginning of the placement. The minimum school leaving age is defined as the last Friday in June in the school year in which the child reaches the age of 16. For further guidance please see the Health and Safety Executive's website www.hse.gov.uk.

5. Child protection issues

The following provisions are applicable to all students who are under the age of 18. 'Child protection' means protecting children against all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect. In taking on a work experience student under the age of 18 the Council takes responsibility for their social welfare as well as their physical welfare. DFES guidance states that

'employers should do all they can to ensure their employees' relationships with young people on work experience are appropriate to their age and gender, and do not give rise to comment or speculation. Attitude, behaviour and language all require care and thought'. (Source 'Work Experience: A guide for secondary schools' DFES, 2002).

Staff will not be subject to the Disclosure of Criminal Background Regulations as a result of working with a young student on work placement (they may of course be subject to these regulations for other reasons). Staff are, however, advised to be aware of the DFES comments set out above, and to ensure that their conduct with students accords with these standards.

If students are taken out of the office by a member of staff, e.g., site visits, court attendance - this must be notified to a senior member of staff in the service area prior to undertaking the visit.

5. First day induction

For many students, their work experience at the Council will be their first contact with the working environment, or they may have been away from work for a considerable period of time. It is therefore important to bear this in mind when arranging their induction. Appendix 1 provides a general checklist of items to consider, but in addition it is recommended that their work is planned and structured carefully. As they may not have previous experience of the kind of work carried out by the Council they may find it unfamiliar and possibly overwhelming. This must be borne in mind when planning tasks.

6. Monitoring arrangements during the placement

The student's progress should be monitored carefully during the placement, for the following reasons:

- The student will not have experience in the tasks they are given – the supervisor must ensure that they are able to carry out their work accurately and efficiently, as there may be serious consequences to their mistakes (for example documents may be misfiled and not easily retrieved).

- The supervisor should give them feedback both during and at the end of their placement on their progress and performance.

In some rare cases it may be necessary for the placement to be terminated by either party. If the supervisor terminates the placement (for example because of poor conduct by the student) there is no requirement to provide notice. However, the student should be informed of the reason for the ending of the placement. There is no right of appeal.

7. Steps to be taken at the conclusion of the placement

Some placements require a report to be completed by the supervisor at the end of a placement. If this is the case it is essential that the status of any such report is clear to both parties i.e. What access will the student have to the completed report and what procedures are in place to deal with any disagreement about the opinions expressed in it? A copy of any report completed by the supervisor should be retained for future reference. This should be passed to the HR Unit where it will be stored.

It is possible that the student will ask the supervisor to be a referee for any future jobs s/he may apply for. This is acceptable, but an open reference should not be supplied (i.e. one addressed 'To whom it may concern'). Any reference provided must state that the student was not an employee of the Council and was working on an unpaid basis.

At the conclusion of the placement it is important that the student hands over any uncompleted work, and that arrangements are made for the surrender of the ID card and security pass. Any Council equipment or documents must also be returned and duly signed for (both when issued and when returned).

Finally, feedback from the student is useful, both on the work carried out and the Council itself. This will help to foster a culture of learning and improvement.

Useful documents (further reading)

1. The Right Start. Work Experience for Young People: health and safety basics for employers. Code INDG364. Downloadable from the HSE website.
2. Managing Health and Safety on Work Experience: A guide for organisers. Code HSG199. Available from HSE Books.
3. Young People at Work: A guide for employers. Code HSG165. Available from HSE Books.